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ABSTRACT

The Japanese-American internment experience during World War II continues to affect the Japanese-American community. This ERIC Digest provides six suggestions for teaching about the Japanese-American internment, touching on civil rights, immigration, the media, "loyalty," redress and reparations, and primary and secondary sources. Includes five internet resources and six references and ERIC resources. (BB)

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Teaching about Japanese-American Internment

by Gary Mukai

When the United States entered World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japanese immigrants and their descendants, including those born in the United States and therefore citizens by birth, were placed in a very awkward situation. The immigrants were resident aliens in the United States, a country at war with their country of birth.

Amid the hysteria following the U.S. entry into World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. This order authorized the War Department to prescribe military areas from which any group of people could be excluded. This served as the legal basis for the evacuation and internment of over 110,000 Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Most were forced to sell their homes and businesses and suffered huge losses. Schooling and careers were completely disrupted.

Even more than 55 years after the closing of the camps, the Japanese-American internment experience continues to deeply affect the Japanese-American community. This period of U.S. history illustrates how the constitutional rights of individuals of a minority group may be at risk during a time of national crisis. This Digest provides six suggestions for teaching about the Japanese-American internment and guides to resources for teachers and students.

1. Set the context for Japanese-American internment through an examination of civil rights. Students should discuss the definition of "civil rights" and consider the importance of civil rights in their lives. They should also consider the U.S. Constitution as a document that describes the basic rights of U.S. citizens. Particular attention should be given to the Bill of Rights and selected amendments, e.g., XIII, XIV, and XV. Point out that the denial of due process to Japanese Americans was the central civil rights violation in their experience with internment. Due process refers to a course of legal proceedings carried out regularly and in accordance with established rules and principles.

2. Introduce the Japanese immigration experience in the early twentieth century. Like the historical experiences of many other ethnic groups in the United States, the Japanese-American historical experience was, at its core, the story of an ethnic minority struggling to find its place within U.S. society. Unlike European immigrants, all Asian immigrants to the United States were considered "aliens ineligible to citizenship" until 1952. Because of this, they could not vote. Asian Americans also experienced segregated schools. In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered 93 Japanese Americans to attend a segregated "Oriental School" with Chinese and other Asian Americans. Laws such as the Alien Land Law of 1913 in California were directed at Asian immigrants to prohibit them from purchasing land. The Immigration Act of 1924 barred further immigration from Asia.

3. Introduce perspectives on Japanese Americans from the media following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Japanese Americans were thrust into a precarious position following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This is an important issue to present to students. The U.S. media would often make no distinction between Japanese Americans and Japanese imperial soldiers. This racial fear and prejudice combined with other forces, such as desire for economic gain, hysteria generated by sensationalistic journalism, political opportunism, and a sincere concern for national safety. The result was a complex mixture of motives that impelled the U.S. government to forcibly intern over 110,000 people of Japanese descent from the West Coast, two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens, into internment camps located in isolated regions of the United States. It is also important to point out that some non-Japanese-American groups, such as the Quakers, did speak out against internment. While the Japanese-American Citizens League, a civil rights organization, urged compliance with the internment orders, several Japanese Americans protested and/or deliberately violated one or more of the evacuation orders. These violations were attempted to test the legality of the evacuation in the courts.

4. Introduce perspectives on the question of "loyalty." In February 1943, after the internment of Japanese Americans from the West Coast had been completed, the War Department and the War Relocation Authority required all internees 17 years of age and older to answer a questionnaire. This questionnaire presumably tested their "loyalty" to the United States. Two questions proved particularly vexing. Question #27 asked, "Are you willing to serve in the armed services of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" Question #28 asked, "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?" Response to this questionnaire was mixed. Out of this confusion emerged three noteworthy groups of individuals: those who answered "yes-yes" and served in the armed forces, those who answered "yes-yes" (or provided qualified responses) but refused to serve in the military from internment camps, and those who answered "no-no." Introduce not only the experiences of the Japanese Americans who served in the military in Europe (100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team) and those who served in the Pacific War (primarily in the Military Intelligence Service as translators and interrogators of Japanese prisoners of war), but also those who answered "no-no" and those who became known as "draft resisters of conscience." The "draft resisters of conscience" refused to serve in the military until their rights as U.S. citizens were restored.

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Most of those who answered "no-no" were segregated at Tule Lake internment camp; many "resisters" were sent to prison from the camps.

5. Introduce redress and reparations. The redress and reparations movement refers to efforts by the Japanese-American community to obtain an apology and compensation from the U.S. government for wrongful actions toward Japanese Americans during World War II. Arguments for and against this movement should be presented as well as the final outcome. Redress payments of $20,000 along with letters of apology (signed by President George Bush in 1990) were presented to approximately 60,000 survivors of the Japanese-American internment.

6. Present diverse perspectives on the Japanese-American internment experience. Extensive primary and secondary sources exist on Japanese-American internment. Consider incorporating some of the following as a way of expanding upon the limited coverage of internment in textbooks:

- Utilizing a U.S. government newsreel from 1943, *Japanese Relocation,* that presents the government's rationale for internment
- Obtaining information from the Japanese American National Museum
- Incorporating art and poetry from the internment camps
- Showing the video *Days of Waiting*, which analyzes the internment experience of a Caucasian woman married to a Japanese American
- Incorporating literature, such as *No-No Boy* by John Okada or *Journey Home* by Yoshiko Uchida
- Examining Japanese-Latin American perspectives on internment (2,264 members of the Japanese community in Latin America were deported to and interned in the United States during World War II)

World Wide Web Resources for Teaching about Japanese-American Internment.

A More Perfect Union: Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Examines the constitutional process by exploring experiences of Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. Reveals how in a time of national crisis, concerns for national security and racial prejudice swept away rights to freedom and due process of law guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Primary sources, including photographs and documents, are included.
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/youmus/ex04unio.htm>

American Concentration Camps. Collection of photographs and audiotapes about the experiences of Japanese Americans in the internment camps of World War II. Compiled by Masumi Hayashi of the Art Department of Cleveland State University. <http://www.csuohio.edu/art_photos/>

Children of the Camps Project. Over half of the Japanese Americans in the internment camps were children. These children's experiences are depicted in a documentary video program, *The Children of the Camps*, which is highlighted at this Web site. The video *Days of Waiting* is also featured. Teacher's guides to the video programs are provided along with related documents and information about the camps. <http://www.naatanet.org/>

Japanese American National Museum. Fact sheets are provided about relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Information is also provided on Japanese-Americans in the U.S. armed forces during World War II. <http://www.janm.org/nrc/>

Zenger Media. The 1943 newsreel *Japanese Relocation* is available through this site. <http://www.zengermedia.com/>

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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